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# MIND THE GAP

## Greece



EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Rea Prouska

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we present information about employees' perspective to their quality of employment in Greece. The information presented has been mainly selected from the 2005 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) data set and the 2007 Fourth European Working Conditions Survey publication.

Organizations that want to remain employers-of-choice must periodically assess how shifts in the business environment might impact the effectiveness of their talents: management strategies, policies and programs. Globalization and changes in the age composition of the workforce are two important 21st century trends that affect today's businesses and make it important for managers to consider:

- How does age affect employees' preferences for an idealized job and their assessments of their employment experiences?
- Do employees' perceptions of their employment experiences vary from country to country?

### *What does "mind the gap" mean?*

Train stations across England play recorded messages to remind passengers that they should "Mind the Gap." These words of caution urge train travelers to pay attention to the space between the door of the train car and the platform in the station for safe commutes and travels.

For this series of our research publications, we have adopted the phrase, "Mind the Gap." The Mind the Gap series aim to remind employers to pay attention to any gaps that might exist between employees' priorities and need and employers' allocation of workplace-based resources. Our Mind the Gap papers also aim to help our readers mind such gaps in quality of employment in other country contexts.

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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work in Boston, in collaboration with the Middlesex University Business School in London, created the Mind the Gap series to provide employers with basic employment-related information country-by-country. There are two types of papers in the Mind the Gap series.

**Employee Series:** This series examines the perspectives that adults of different ages have about employment and the assessments that they make about their employment experiences. These papers focus on one central question: *Does age affect employees' preferences for an idealized job and their assessments of their employment experiences?*

**Employer Series:** This series examines the prevalence of human resource policies and programs at workplaces in a selected country. Because most talent-management strategies and programs are age-neutral, we compare the availability of selected human resource policies in practices in the targeted country with the availability of similar policies and practices in a small number of countries with approximate economic circumstances. These papers focus on one core question: *How does the availability of human resource policies and programs in the targeted country compare with other countries?*

Although papers in both series focus on a single country, when the information contained in two or more papers are considered in tandem, it is possible to consider whether employees' perceptions of their employment experiences vary from country to country.



## Quality of Employment: Dimensions of a “Good Job” and a “Good Place to Work”

Most people would agree that good jobs are a good thing. High-quality jobs offer benefits to employees and to the organizations where they work.

- **Benefits for Employees:** The quality of employment affects the health and well-being of employees. Research confirms that poor-quality jobs (such as jobs requiring extreme work hours or jobs that are very demanding, particularly those where employees do not have access to the resources they need to meet those demands) are associated with negative outcomes, including high stress levels and physiological reactions, like cardio-vascular problems.<sup>1</sup>
- **Benefits for Employers:** Employers often connect the quality of employment they offer to employees to their employer-of-choice strategies. There is some evidence that the adoption of policies and practices that promote the quality of employment available to employees is related to positive outcomes for organizations, such as customer satisfaction and organizational performance.<sup>2</sup> Employer-of-choice strategies can result in enhanced employee engagement that, in turn, can be linked to organizational outcomes, including financial measures. For example, higher employee engagement can reduce costs such as those associated with unwanted turnover. One study found that 59% of highly engaged employees report that they “intend to stay” with their employers in comparison to the 24% of disengaged employees who “intend to stay.”<sup>3</sup> A number of studies have linked employee job satisfaction with positive performance indicators. *Fortune* reports positive relationships between being recognized as a “great place to work” and stock indices.<sup>4, 5</sup>

In this paper, we focus on seven important dimensions of the quality of employment:

- Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits
  - Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement
  - Wellness, Health & Safety Protections
  - Opportunities for Meaningful Work
  - Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities
  - Workplace Flexibility
  - Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity
  - Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace\*
- \* (This dimension is omitted due to lack of data availability).

The following sections of this paper use the quality of employment framework as a structure to discuss the perspectives of employees about their employment situations.

# QUALITY EMPLOYMENT IN GREECE:

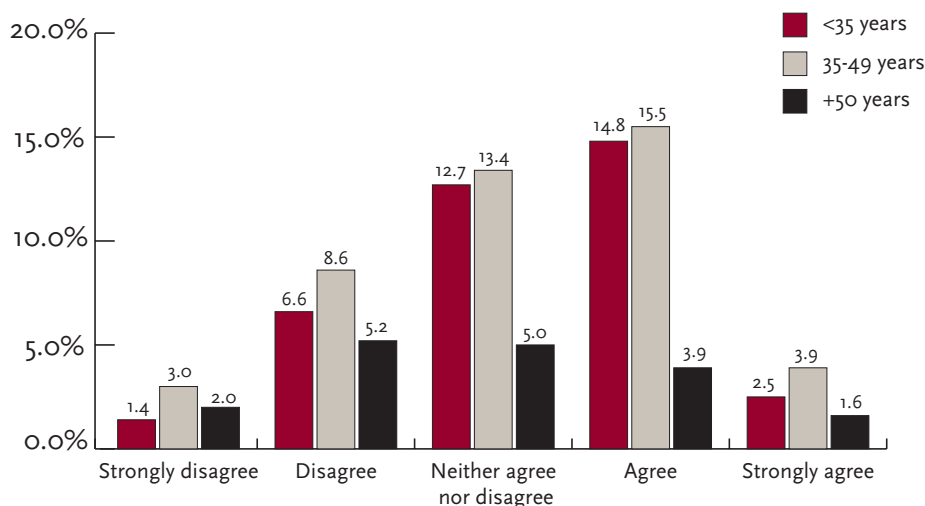
## I. Indicators of Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits

- *Compensation and benefits are distributed in a fair and equitable manner, meeting most of employees' basic economic needs.*

- A little less than half of Greek employees (42%) agreed that they were well paid for the work they did on their jobs. However, almost one-third (31%) neither agreed nor disagreed and almost one-third (27%) disagreed that they were well paid.
- There are more middle-aged workers (11.6%) dissatisfied with their pay compared to younger (8%) or older (7.2%) workers. More older workers disagreed/strongly disagreed (7.2%) than those who agreed/strongly agreed (5.5%) with their employment compensation. (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>
- In 2005, the lowest 10% of wage earners in Greece received less than €450 (\$550) in net wages per month, while the highest 10% of wage earners received more than €1,500 (\$1,833) monthly. (Table 1).<sup>7</sup>
- In Greece, according to the EU Labour Force Survey in 2000, approximately 12% of men and 4-6% of women aged 65 and over remained in the workforce. Over a third of those aged 65+ had income that placed them at risk of poverty.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 1: Yearly Income by Age Group



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 1 shows, Greek employees agreed (42%) that they were paid well for their jobs, although 31% neither agreed or disagreed, and 27% disagreed.

As Table 1 shows, 70% of wage earners in Greece received less than €950 (\$1,160) in net wages per month in 2005.

Table 1: Average Monthly Net Income in Greece in 2005

EUR and USD* Income in Greece by Percentile		
Percentile Brackets	EUR (2005)	USD (2010)
D10	450	550
D20	500	611
D30	550	672
D40	600	733
D50	700	855
D60	800	977
D70	950	1,160
D80	1,150	1,405
D90	1,500	1,833

\*XE.com currency converter was used on June 3, 2010  
Source: Fourth EWCS (2007)<sup>7</sup>

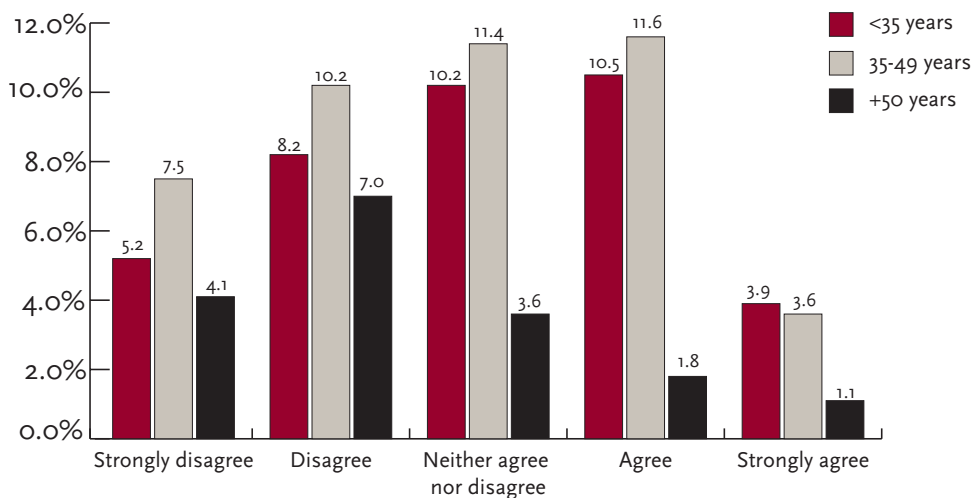
## II. Indicators of Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement

- *Opportunities for the development of expanded skills and responsibilities are available.*

- The level of education in Greece is close to the European average, however, the percentage of young people (aged 25-29 years) with upper-secondary education is higher than the EU average.<sup>9</sup>
- The level of employee training in Greece hardly reached 20%, as is the case in Spain, Hungary, Portugal and Romania. In comparison, more than 50% of workers received training at work in northern European countries.<sup>7</sup>
- Overall, 42.2% of Greek workers disagreed/strongly disagreed that their jobs offered good prospects for career advancement, compared to those who agreed/strongly agreed (32.5%). Of these employees, older workers disagreed/strongly disagreed, while younger and middle-aged workers tended to agree/strongly agree.
- A greater degree of older workers (11.1%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that their jobs offered good prospects for career advancement, than those who agreed/strongly agreed (2.9%). In addition, 14.4% of young workers agreed/strongly agreed, compared to 13.4% who disagreed/strongly disagreed. Of middle-aged workers 17.7% agreed/strongly agreed compared to 15.2% who disagreed/strongly disagreed.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Employees Who Feel Their Jobs Offer Good Prospects for Career Advancement



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 2 shows, less older workers disagreed/strongly disagreed that their jobs offered career advancement opportunities compared to younger and middle-aged workers.

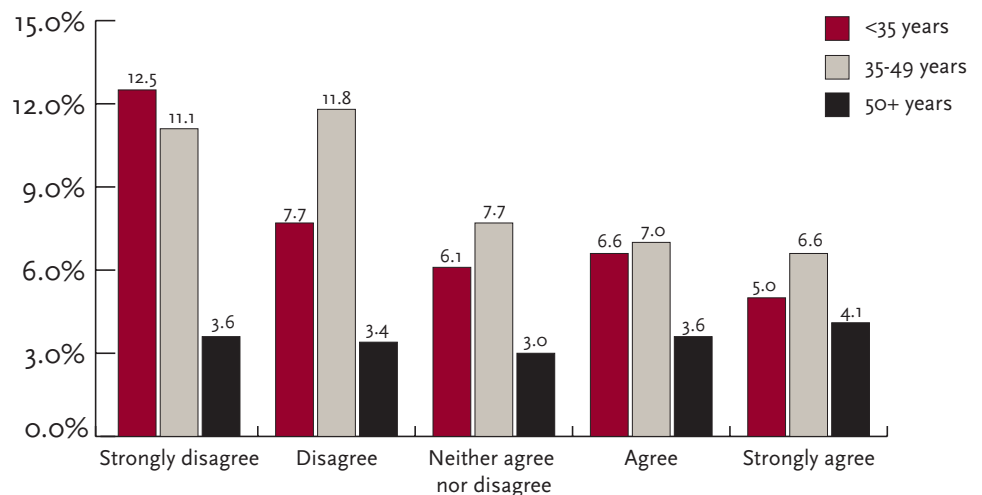
### III. Indicators of Wellness, Health & Safety Protections

- *Well-being is promoted through workplace policies, and social protections are offered in case of illness.*



- According to the Fourth EWCS (2007), around two thirds of Greek workers reported that their work affected their health.<sup>7</sup> This percentage ranks first in comparison to 30 other EU countries. Musculoskeletal problems, stress, heart diseases and respiratory problems and infections are the leading cause for work-related health problems among Greek employees.<sup>10</sup>
- According to the EWCS (2005), when asked if employees felt that they worked in dangerous or unhealthy conditions, both younger employees (20.2%) and middle-aged employees (22.9%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that they worked in dangerous or unhealthy conditions. This is in comparison to 11.6% of younger and 13.6% of middle-aged workers who agreed/strongly agreed, however, among older workers 7.7% believed that they worked in dangerous or unhealthy conditions, in comparison to 7% who did not.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 3).
- The majority of younger employees (22%), middle-aged employees (27.1%) and older workers (12.5%) agreed/strongly agreed that they found their work too demanding and stressful. This is in comparison to 8.8% of younger, 7% of middle-aged and 3.9% of older workers who disagreed/strongly disagreed that their employment situations were too demanding and stressful.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Employees Who Feel They Work in Dangerous or Unhealthy Conditions'

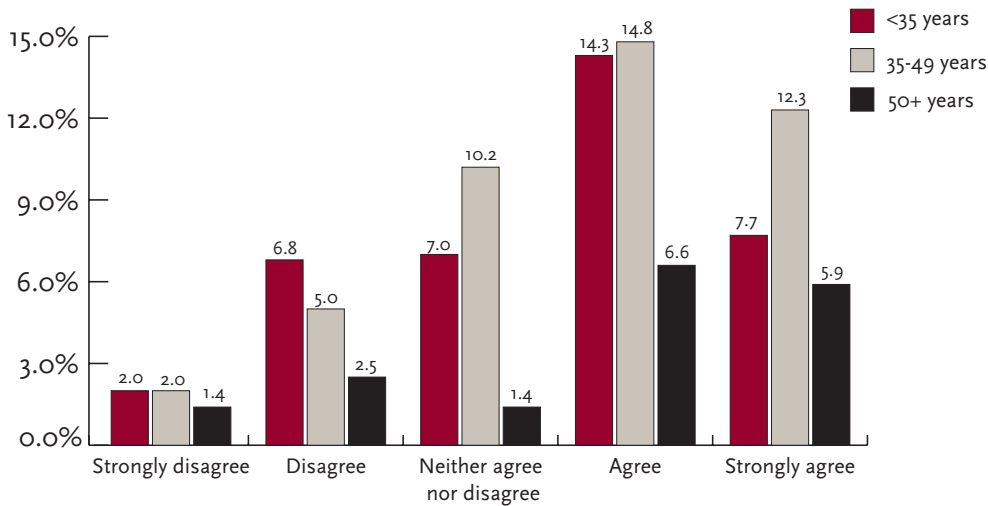


Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 3 shows, younger and middle-aged workers do not think that they work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions.



Figure 4: Employees Who Feel That Their Work is Too Demanding and Stressful



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of younger, middle-aged and older workers found their jobs too demanding and stressful.

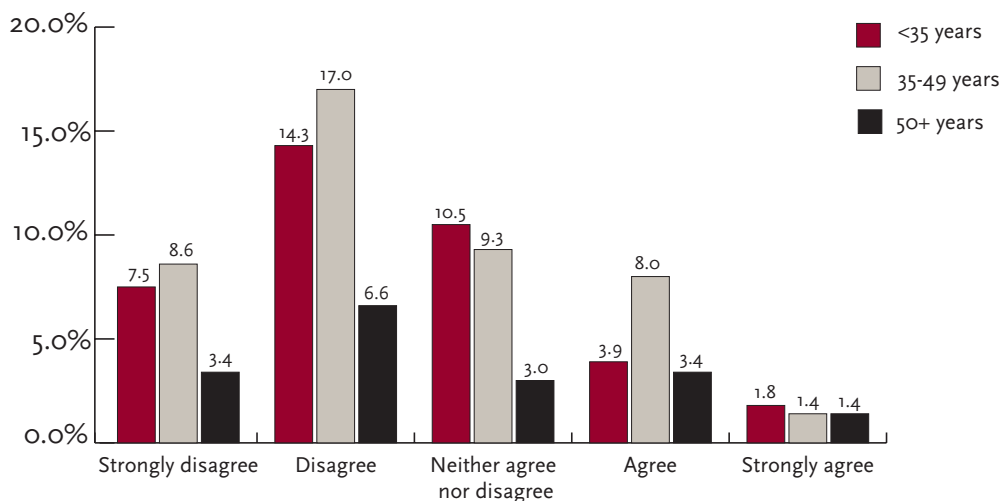
#### IV. Indicators of Opportunities for Meaningful Work

► *Opportunities for meaningful and fulfilling work are available.*

- There are more middle-aged workers (9.4%) than younger (5.7%) and older (4.8%) workers who find their work dull and boring.<sup>6</sup> In addition, 10% of older workers disagreed/strongly disagreed that their work was dull or boring, in comparison to 21.8% of younger and 25.6% of middle-aged workers. (Figure 5)



Figure 5: Employees Who Feel Their Work is Dull and Boring



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As suggested by the findings presented in Figure 5, there is a greater percentage of middle-aged workers who find their work dull and boring.

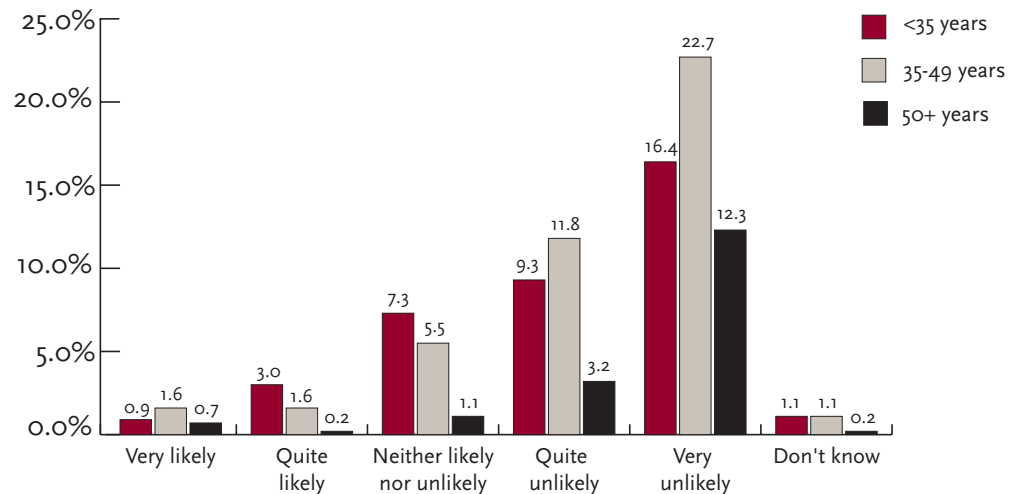
## V. Indicators of Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities

- *Terms of employment are communicated clearly, with an emphasis on smooth transitions through jobs and careers.*



- According to the EWCS (2005), younger workers (3.9%), middle-aged (3.2%) and older workers (0.9%) felt very likely/quite likely that they would lose their main job in the next 6 months. Middle-aged workers appeared more confident about job security (34.5%), in comparison to younger (25.7%) and older workers (15.5%) who found it quite unlikely/very unlikely they would lose their main job in the next 6 months.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 6)
- It is important to remember that the EWCS survey was conducted in 2005, before the major global financial crisis. Unemployment has been rising sharply in the European Union since March 2008 as a result of the economic crisis. In November 2009, the unemployment level in Greece stood at 10.6%. From this percentage, 25.8% represented young workers (those under 25 years of age), and 8.3% workers aged between 25 and 74 years.<sup>11</sup>
- Regarding job security, the Greek parliament passed a new law guaranteeing job security in May 2010. The law covers economically dependent work, part-time and short-time work, temporary agency work, as well as other flexible forms of employment. The law also outlines provisions on employee layoffs, work time arrangements, the length of the work week, and the resolution of workplace disputes.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 6: Employees Who Feared Unemployment in the Next Six Months



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

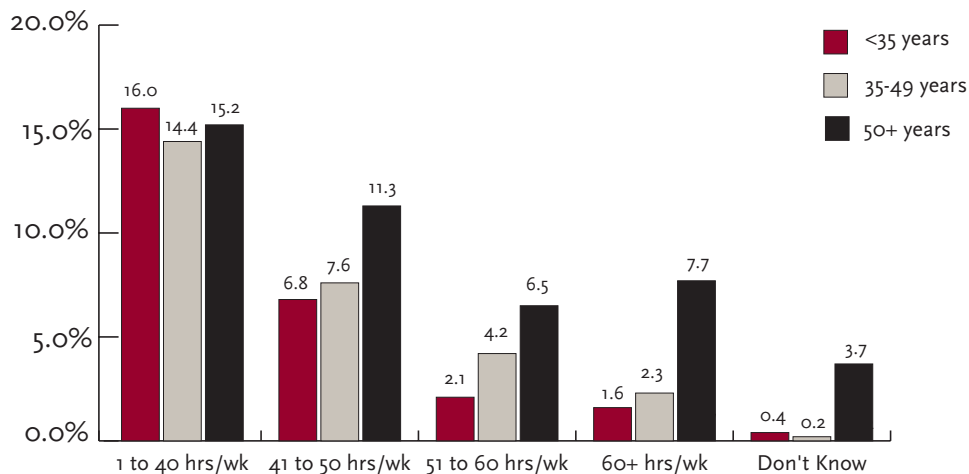
## VI. Indicators of Workplace Flexibility

- *Options, choice, and control over work conditions and hours are available.*

- According to the EWCS (2005), 14.2% of older workers worked on average more than 50 hours per week. This is in comparison to 3.7% of younger and 6.5% of middle-aged workers. Long work hours are important determinants of the quality of work and have implications for health and work-life balance.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 7)
- Middle-aged workers were more likely to face difficulties in fulfilling their family responsibilities due to the amount of time spent on the job, in comparison to younger and older workers. When asked if employees had difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities due to time restraints of the job, 20.2% of middle-aged workers stated that they faced difficulties several times a week or a month, in comparison to 15.9% of younger and 9.3% of older workers.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 8)
- According to the EWCS (2005), more middle-aged workers (25.9%) enjoyed a greater degree of flexibility in deciding how to do their work, in comparison to younger (19.5%) and older (11.1%) workers. However, an almost equal percentage of younger (9.8%) and middle-aged (10.2%) workers disagreed/strongly disagreed that they had options of work flexibility.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 9)



Figure 7: Average Hours of Work Per Week by Age Group

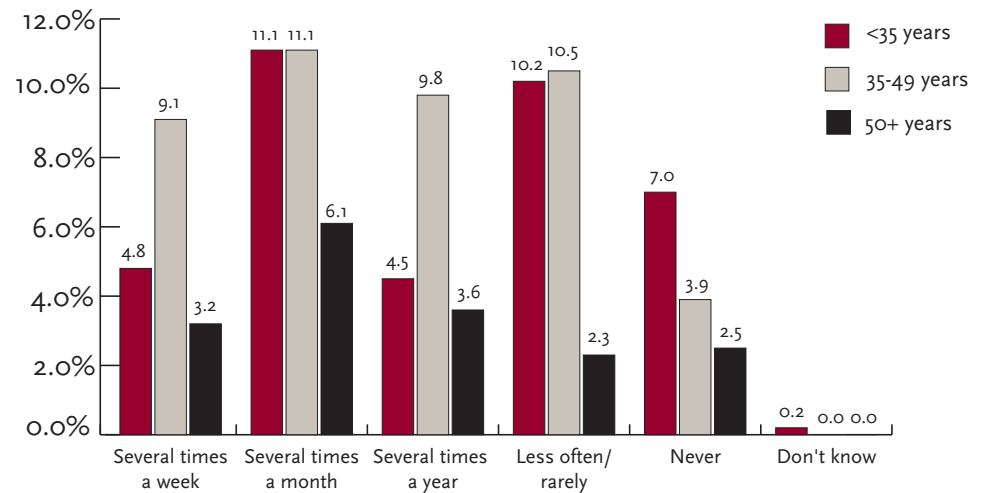


Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 7 shows, there are more older workers than younger or middle-aged employees, who work more than 50 hours per week, on average.

As Figure 8 shows, middle-aged workers were more likely to face difficulties in fulfilling their work-family responsibilities than younger and older workers.

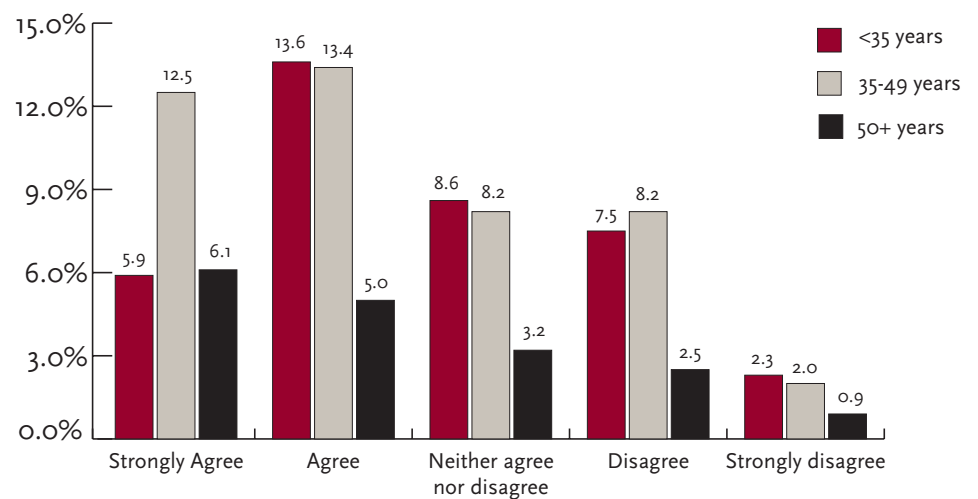
Figure 8: Employees With Difficulty Balancing Family-Job Responsibilities



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

As Figure 9 shows, middle-aged workers enjoyed a greater degree of flexibility in deciding how to do their work than did younger and older workers.

Figure 9: Employees With Work Flexibility Options



Source: EWCS (2005)<sup>6</sup>

## VII. Indicators of Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity

- ▶ *Diversity, inclusion, and employee personal growth are valued.*
- According to a 2005 study conducted by the Research Centre for Gender Equality, Greece still has one of the largest gender gaps in employment compared with other EU Member States. In 2006, this gap accounted for 28.2%, with an employment rate of 48.2% for women compared with 76.4% for men. Even though a series of measures were introduced aimed at boosting women's employability and at reconciling family and working life, gender equality in employment still remains a challenge in Greece.<sup>13</sup>



## VIII. Indicators of Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace

- ▶ *Interactions with supervisors and coworkers are professional and respectful.*
- *This dimension is omitted due to lack of data availability*



## SUMMARY: MINDING THE GAP

The dimensions of the quality of employment were examined among workers in Greece, using primarily the European Working Conditions Survey (2005) dataset and the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (2007) publication.

Greek workers perceive pay to be an important factor in employment, however, Greek employees feel that they are not paid well for the jobs they perform. In particular, middle-aged workers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their salary than younger or older workers. However, data from the EU Labour Force Survey show that over a third of those aged 65 and over have an income which puts them at risk of poverty.

Although the level of education in Greece is close to the European average, the percentage of young people with upper-secondary education is higher than the EU average. This presents an important challenge when one considers that of the 10.6% unemployment rate currently present in Greece, 25.8% corresponds to young workers. In addition, employer training provision levels are low in Greece, while older workers tend to believe that their job does not offer good prospects for career advancement.

Around two thirds of Greek workers report that their work affects their health. Most younger and middle-aged workers do not feel that they work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions. However, there were slightly more older workers who thought that their working conditions were dangerous or unhealthy than those who did not. Furthermore, the majority of younger, middle-aged and older workers found their work too demanding and stressful. In addition, there were more middle-aged workers than younger and older workers who found their work dull and boring.

Regarding job security, middle-aged workers appeared more confident about their job security in comparison to younger and older workers. However, it is important to note that the data presented in this paper were gathered before the major financial crisis. Unemployment rates and job insecurity have since increased in Greece, although the Greek parliament recently passed a new law guaranteeing job security to economically dependent work, part-time and short-time work, temporary agency work, as well as other flexible forms of employment.

More older workers than younger or middle-aged ones work, on average, more than 50 hours a week. However, middle-aged workers are more likely to face difficulties in fulfilling their family responsibilities due to the amount of time they spend on the job, in comparison to younger and older workers.

Finally, Greece still has one of the largest gender gaps in its employment rate when compared with other EU Member States, although a series of measures have been introduced targeting to increase women's employability and aiding work-life balance for women.

## CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE GAP

Considering the data presented in this paper, the following challenges are evident:

- There is a need to address the gap between young workers' educational qualifications and high unemployment rate. Job security is also an important issue for younger workers.
- Middle-aged workers are faced with multiple challenges: dissatisfaction with pay condition, work that is dull and boring, difficulties in managing work-life balance issues.
- Older workers are faced with a higher risk of poverty, do not feel that their work is offering good prospects for career advancement, perceive their working conditions as dangerous or unhealthy, and on average, work more than 50 hours a week in comparison to younger and middle-aged workers.

Addressing the above issues may be a challenge under the current financial crisis. However, as the Greek workplace is faced with the task of modernizing itself and meeting EU standards, the population's expectations for quality of work are increasing.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

Established in 2007 by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work, the Global Perspectives Institute is an international collaboration of scholars and employers committed to the expansion of the quality of employment available to the 21st-century multi-generational workforce in countries around the world.

The Global Perspectives Institute focuses on innovative and promising practices that might be adopted by employers and policy-makers.

The Institute's research, publications, and international forums contribute to:

- ▶ a deeper understanding of the employment experiences and career aspirations of employees of different ages who work in countries around the world;
- ▶ informed decision making by employers who want to be employers of choice in different countries; and
- ▶ innovative thinking about private-public partnerships that promote sustainable, high quality employment.

In addition to the Mind the Gap series, the Global Perspectives Institute publishes a Statistical Profile Series that highlights workforce demographic trends in different countries and a Global Policy Series that focuses on selected workforce policy in certain country contexts.

For more information on SCAW publications, please visit us online at:  
[www.bc.edu/agingandwork](http://www.bc.edu/agingandwork)

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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College promotes quality of employment as an imperative for the 21st-century multi-generational workforce. We integrate evidence from research with insights from workplace experiences to inform innovative organizational decision making. Collaborating with business leaders and scholars in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, the Center develops the next generation of knowledge and talent management.

The Sloan Center on Aging & Work is grateful for the continued support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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Dr. Rea Prouska is a senior lecturer in Human Resource Management (HRM) and programme leader for the BA (Hons) HRM at Middlesex University Business School in London. Her research interests fall within the fields of HR outsourcing/offshoring, graduate employability and gender.

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4 Great Places to Work Institute. *What makes a great place to work: Financial results*. Retrieved from <http://www.greatplacetowork.com/great/graphs.php>

5 Unfortunately, most of the research linking employer-of-choice strategies with business outcomes tends to focus on correlational relationships. Such studies do not definitively establish that being a “best place to work” causes positive organizational performance; indeed, it also might be true that high profits and strong financial growth cause higher employee engagement and foster perceptions that a particular workplace is an employer of choice.

- 6 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) has been monitoring the working conditions of European workers on a period basis. The survey has been carried out four times by the Eurofound (The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions): in 1990/91, 1995/96, 2000 (extended to cover the 10 new member states, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey in 2001/02) and 2005 (31 countries). In this paper, the EWCS (2005) dataset was mainly analyzed.
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### *Mind the Gap Series:*

MTG01: United States, Employee  
MTG01: United States, Employer  
MTG02: Japan, Employee  
MTG02: Japan, Employer  
MTG03: South Korea, Employee  
MTG03: South Korea, Employer  
MTG04: United Kingdom, Employee  
MTG04: United Kingdom, Employer  
MTG05: China, Employee  
MTG06: Singapore, Employer  
MTG07: Australia, Employer  
MTG07: Australia, Employee  
MTG08: Denmark, Employee  
MTG08: Denmark, Employer  
MTG09: Italy, Employer  
MTG10: Spain, Employee  
MTG11: France, Employee  
MTG12: Brazil, Employee  
MTG12: Brazil, Employer  
MTG13: Mexico, Employee

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